



Mountain Bike Trails Public Scoping Notes

Big Bend Mountain Bike Trails
Scoping Meeting
Study Butte, TX Community Center
January 31, 2006
28 participants

"GROUP MEMORY"

Desired Outcome: To understand public sentiment towards expanding mountain bicycling opportunities within Big Bend National Park.

Background and NPS Position

- On March 17, 2006, the National Park Service and the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) signed a general agreement with the goal of "providing high quality bicycling opportunities for visitors to enjoy the national park system, in appropriate areas in a manner consistent with our stewardship responsibilities."
- The agreement encourages the NPS to cooperate with IMBA and affiliate organizations to identify mutually beneficial projects or activities. (Copies were made available)
- Following the signing of the agreement, the Big Bend Trails Alliance asked the NPS to consider expanding mountain bicycle opportunities within the National Park.
- Big Bend National Park investigated becoming a "pilot park" for the purposes of this agreement.
- The Park has already received approximately 100 email comments on this project.

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- Expanding mountain bicycling opportunities requires compliance with NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) and rule making.
- Internal and external public scoping initiates the NEPA process. A public scoping letter was broadly distributed (copies available)
- A contractor will be hired to complete an environmental assessment (EA) that develops a range of alternatives.
- The formal EA begins after the initial scoping. Ample opportunities for civic engagement in developing alternatives will be included in the workplan.
- The Park did not have staff or funding to initiate the Environmental Assessment. Several organizations and the NPS Intermountain Region are providing the necessary funds. Bikes Belong Coalition - \$10,000, IMBA - \$2000, NPS - \$8000, Big Bend Trails Alliance -- \$1500+

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- Big Bend National Park is already open to mountain bicycle use. Bike riding is restricted to paved (120 miles) and unpaved roads (180 miles).

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- This planning process will explore the feasibility of expanding bike riding.

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- Bicycle riding within National Parks must comply with the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 4.30) and all other applicable laws, regulations, and policies of the NPS.
- Proposed bike use on all other routes within developed zone, and administrative roads outside of developed zones will require analysis, including public comment, and decision pursuant to NEPA. Any proposed routes that are not within developed zones must be promulgated as special regulations.
- If the EA finds new mountain bicycling opportunities are acceptable, the NPS will have to pursue rule changes.
- NPS Management Policies (2001) reference off-road bicycling. Each unit must develop special park specific regulations.
- The Wilderness Act places some additional constraints on mountain bicycle trails in Big Bend. Of the 801,000 acres in the Park, approximately 500,000 are proposed as wilderness. Under the Wilderness Act, proposed wilderness designations are treated as wilderness until Congress makes a final determination.
- Mechanized and motorized equipment is prohibited in wilderness areas.

The NPS does not have a position on this issue. The Park will complete its investigation. There is no pre-determined outcome.

There were no questions specifically related to NPS position.

## **Public Comments**

### *Wishes*

- Statement from Big Bend Trails Alliance : The end result should be a high quality trail experience. High quality is defined as a fun ride on a good trail, a backcountry type experience away from roads; something worth coming to Big Bend for.
- Wish for on-going trail development over time as conditions allow.

Connections for a trails network are important. We want to look at all possibilities.

IMBA perspective is to advocate for single track trails. A high quality experience could have a loop system. The Grapevine Hills area could provide this type of experience, and it has backcountry campsites.

The history aspect is an important part of the experience. The ride experience could be a destination ride to a historical feature.

### *Worries*

- Q: Is the Chimney Trail being considered for riding?

A: Almost all existing park trails are located within the proposed wilderness zones. So none of those trails will have mountain bicycle use.

- Q: How wide a range can NPS get on the scope of an EA?

A: The EA could address several corridors at once.

- Q: Who will identify the trail corridors for consideration?

Response: The public and park staff can work collaboratively on this. Some criteria to consider could be: checking wilderness boundary locations, location suitability, is it worth the energy to build the trails. Field/site visits will have to be done.

- Concern about the cost of an Environmental Assessment for each project.

Response: Each EA costs approximately \$25,000. For this project, many partners have offered assistance.

The NPS Intermountain Regional Office is contributing \$8,000, Bikes Belong is contributing \$10,000, the International Mountain Bicycling Association is contributing \$2,000 and the Big Bend Trails Alliance is rallying local community support, so far about \$2,000.

- Q: Are other old roads available for consideration?

A: Not if they are within the wilderness zones. {Roads can exist within wilderness study areas if the intent is to restore the road corridors to natural conditions.}

- Concerns about funding new trail construction. Labor isn't cheap and free labor is often not delivered.

A: Projects would be funded through standard NPS prioritization process. There is a strong commitment from the local cycling community to raise funds for trail construction.

- Concern: With additional activities and new park users, there are concerns about litter, bicycle tracks up washes, and riders generally going off trails. Who will keep the riders on trails in this sensitive environment?

- The Big Bend desert will be damaged the 1st time a bike crosses it. 200 miles of dirt roads should be enough for mountain bicyclists. Overuse, if 6000 Texas bicyclists come to Big Bend at one time!

Responses: BBTA invites everyone to walk or bike the single track trails at Lajitas resort. We can show good examples of sustainability. Arroyo bottoms are an example or a resource that can heal from tire tracks.

- Trails will be built sustainably. They will be 1-2 foot wide, manage slope and gradient, and install appropriate educational and regulatory signage. Sustainable trails are defined as those that do not erode.
- Currently, bicycle use within the park is limited to park roads either paved or unpaved. Riders must adhere to traffic signs, as bicycles are treated as vehicles.

- The Big Bend backcountry road guide could be used to inform bicyclists. It could lead to a bicyclists guide to the park.

- If cycling takes hold in the park, users will police themselves. Other communities that have strong bike opportunities have good cadre of support. We recognize we will always have some renegade bikers, hikers, etc.

- There is a misconception about park roads. Only about 30% of the dirt roads are really usable. They don't provide loop opportunities, and roads do detract from a high-quality riding experience.

- The type of user coming to Big Bend may be better experienced. They will have better skills and these users are educated. People would stay on "cool loop trails" if they knew they existed.

- Concerns: Finances: Law enforcement, EMS, Trail Crews are stretched thin. Park volunteers are stretched thin. Will this project take resources from other divisions?

Responses: many users in Texas State Parks are mountain bike users. This is generating additional income to the state.

- The National Mountain Bike Patrol could be a model to help police and monitor the trails.
- Local business funding is being generated; mountain bikers are raising funds, bikers police themselves.
- An IMBA Action Alert has generated 120 emails. A majority of comments expressed interest in trails development/patrol and offers to help.

- If Big Bend was a mountain bike destination, it would increase visitation.

- If mountain bike community doesn't generate funds and resources for these projects they may not happen. It's unlikely the park would support them. (comment from BBTA)

- The park has a concern about having on-going funds to support trail maintenance.

- The park would have to implement a resource monitoring methodology on the trails. Visitor Experience and Resource Protection, Limits of Acceptable Change, Carrying Capacity are some models to consider.

- All visitors to the park should have a right to enjoy their activity.

- A shared-use concept for these trails is endorsed by some.

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## **INFORMATION NEEDS**

- The Park should talk with Saguaro National Park and Mammoth Caves National Park on how they regulate their mountain bike trails
- We need good communication on the progress of this project. BBTA could be the conduit of information from the park.
- The park website could summarize information.
- Better maps are needed that illustrate wilderness boundaries
- Other organizations have successful programs. Fruita, CO, Texas State Parks are examples.
- Texas Bike Coalition is a good resource.
- Any organization that promotes physical health.